

Soviet Famines

Famines soviétiques

Hongersnoden in het Soviëttijdperk

Nicolas Werth

Translator: Jennie Malcolm



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/3577>

DOI: 10.4000/temoigner.3577

ISSN: 2506-6390

Publisher:

Éditions du Centre d'études et de documentation Mémoire d'Auschwitz, Éditions Kimé

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 October 2015

Number of pages: 145

ISSN: 2031-4183

Electronic reference

Nicolas Werth, "Soviet Famines", *Témoigner. Entre histoire et mémoire* [Online], 121 | 2015, Online since 01 October 2016, connection on 05 September 2021. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/temoigner/3577> ; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4000/temoigner.3577>

This text was automatically generated on 5 September 2021.

Tous droits réservés

Soviet Famines

Famines soviétiques

Hongersnoden in het Soviëttijdperk

Nicolas Werth

Translation : Jennie Malcolm

- 1 As the historian James Mace has correctly written, the Soviet famines of 1931-1933 which struck many regions of the U S S R (especially Ukraine, Kazakhstan and regions of the Volga), were an unprecedented catastrophe in which meteorology played merely a tiny part. These were “man-made famines”, a direct consequence of a policy of extreme violence – forced collectivization campaigns – implemented by the Stalinist regime in 1930. As a direct consequence of a specific policy, but obviously not predicted and much less “programmed”, famine was, in Ukraine and the Kuban - and only in these regions – *intentionally* worsened from the autumn of 1932 by Stalin’s unshakable will to break, by the weapon of hunger, the particularly stubborn resistance of Ukrainian peasants, and also of a number of Ukrainian communists, to collectivization and excessive levies on crops.
- 2 Denied by the Soviet authorities until the disappearance of the U S S R, famine in post-Soviet Ukraine has become not only a major object of study, but a central element of the new Ukrainian national identity. In 2006, the Ukrainian Parliament declared the Holodomor “genocide against the Ukrainian people”. For most historians of the Ukraine, three major elements constitute the crime of genocide: the confiscation of all food supplies of the peasants for three critical months (late 1932–early 1933); the embargo of the starvation campaigns from late January 1933, and proof of intentionality. This was produced by documents signed by Stalin, notably his instructions from 1 January 1933, calling for intensified confiscation and repression against the peasants, and those of 22 January 1933, initiating the blockade of starving villages.
- 3 If we accept this qualification, it should however be emphasized that the Holodomor was very different from the Holocaust. It did not propose the extermination of all Ukrainians (approximately 12% of the Ukrainian population – perhaps 3,5 million

people – died of starvation during the famine). It did not rest on the direct killing of the victims. It was motivated and prepared on the basis of a political rationality and not on ethnic or racial grounds (if the Ukrainians constituted 85-90 % of the victims, the famine did not spare the German, Polish and Jewish minorities). However, in the number of its victims, the Holodomor, placed in its historical context, is the only European event of the twentieth century that can be compared to two other genocides: the Armenian genocide and the Holocaust.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Conquest, Robert, *Sanglantes moissons* [Bloody harvest], Paris: Robert Laffont, 1996.

Graziosi, Andrea, *Lettres de Kharkov* [Letters from Kharkiv], Lausanne: Noir sur Blanc, 2014.

Sokoloff, Georges (ed.), 1933. *L'année noire* [The dark year], Paris: Albin Michel, 2000.

Werth, Nicolas, 'Retour sur la grande famine ukrainienne de 1932-1933' [On the great Ukrainian famine of 1932-1933], *Vingtième Siècle. Revue d'Histoire* 121, 2014, 77-96.

AUTHORS

NICOLAS WERTH

IHTP/CNRS